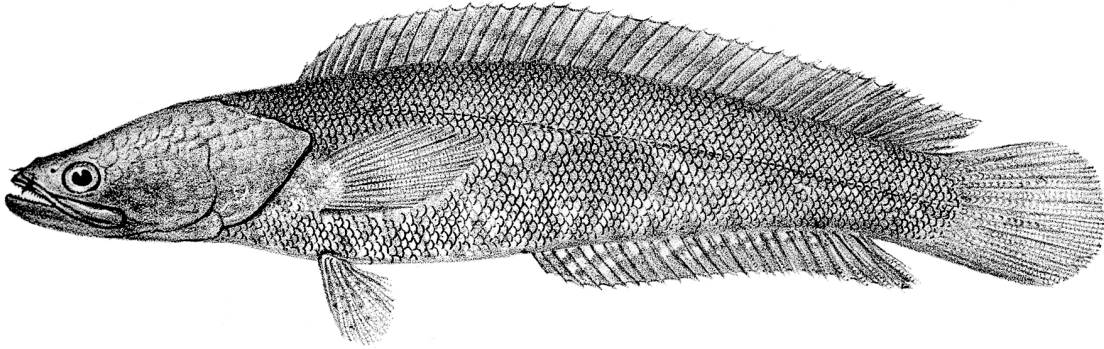
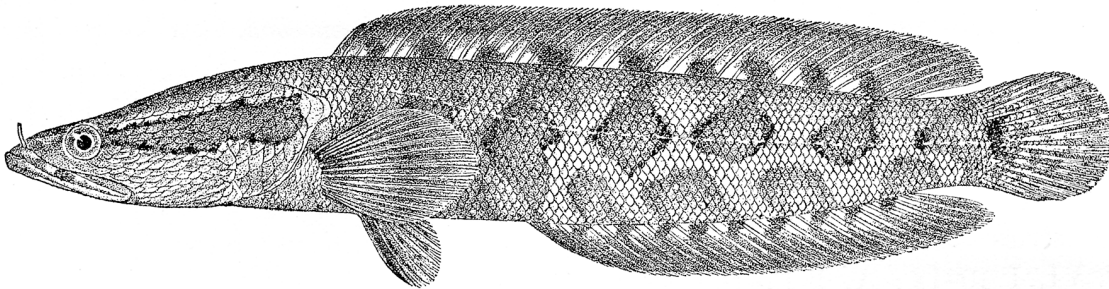


***Parachanna insignis* (Sauvage, 1884)**  
**Congo Snakehead**



After Sauvage, 1884



After Boulenger, 1916

**Original description:** *Ophiocephalus insignis* Sauvage, 1884:195, pl. 5, fig. 3. Notes sur des poissons de Franceville, Haut Ogooué. Bull. Soc. Zool. France 90, 1884:193-198. Type locality: upper Ogooué River, Gabon. Syntypes: MNHN 1844-0301 to 0305.

**Synonyms:** *Ophiocephalus obscurus* Poll, 1942.

*Parophiocephalus insignis* Daget and Stauch, 1963.

*Ophiocephalus obscurus* Matthes, 1964.

**Common names:** **Congo snakehead**; light African snakehead; ifoïfoli (juvenile; Zaire), foli (adult; Zaire).

**Native range:** Ogooué River basin, Gabon; Zaire River basin, Congo and Zaire. Bonou and Teugels (1985) recorded this species from above Boyoma (Stanley) Falls in the Lualaba (Congo) River. Guy Teugels (personal commun., 2002) stated that he doubted this distribution to be the result of an introduction into the upper Lualaba.

**Introduced range:** No introductions known.

**Size:** To about 45 cm.

**Habitat preference:** Bonou and Teugels (1985) noted that no specific studies of the biology of this species had been undertaken. General information indicates this snakehead occupies creeks, rivers, lakes, and lagoons, and sometimes in deep waters in calm areas.

**Temperature preference:** No specific information. Nevertheless, the native range of this species is equatorial/tropical.

**Reproductive habits:** Gosse (1963) commented that little is known of the reproduction of this snakehead. Nevertheless, he had observed juveniles (“de 30 à 40 mm”) in groups, guarded by a large adult. He misidentified this species as *Ophiocephalus obscurus* in central Zaire.

**Feeding habits:** Gosse (1963) described this species as “un ichthyophage typique.” He noted that stomach contents of nine specimens contained primarily fishes (*Pelmatochromis*, *Tilapia*, *Hemichromis*, *Xenomystus*, cyprinodonts and fish remains).

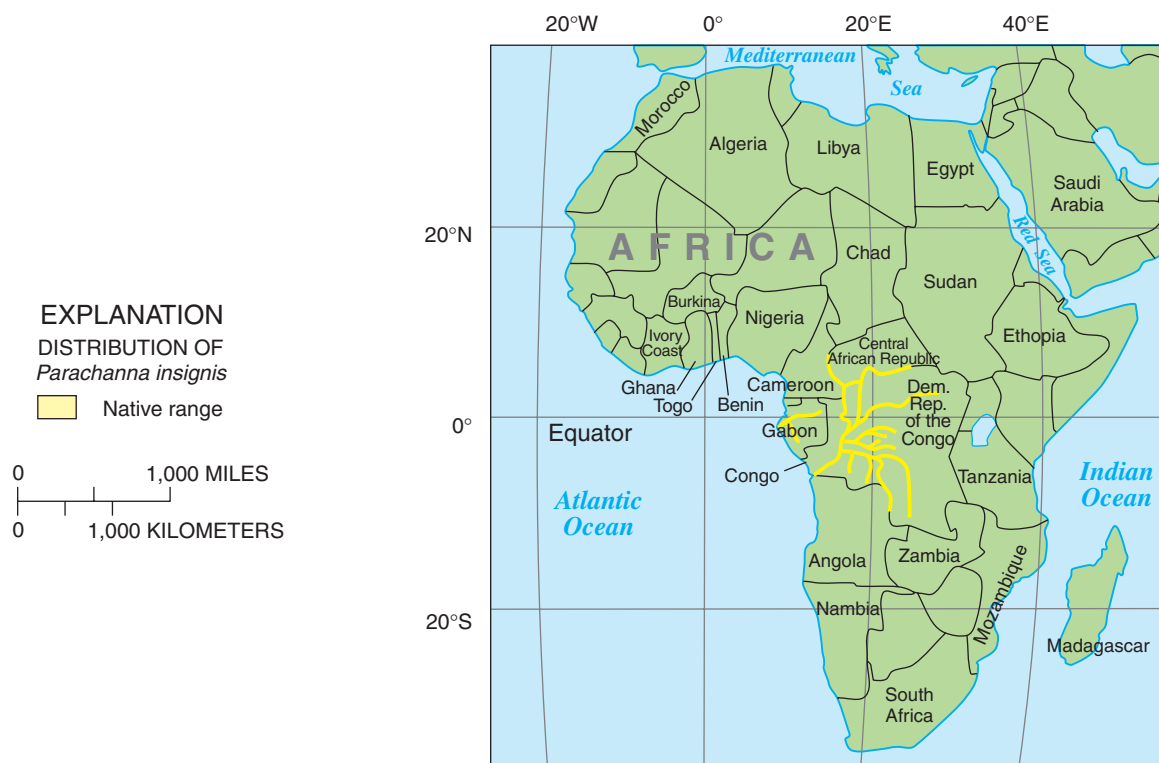
**Characters:** Patch of scales present in gular region. No canine teeth on prevomer or palatines. Scales in a transverse line 25-33 with 7-10 above the lateral line and 16-22 below; lateral line scales 73-86. Dorsal fin rays 40-44; anal fin rays 27-31. Head slightly depressed anteriorly and covered with large scales. Lower jaw longer than upper jaw with 4-5 well-developed canine teeth on each side. Lateral line complete. Coloration is distinct among African chanids in that there are chevron-shaped bars across the middle of the back that extend up onto the dorsal fin; central area of sides contain 4-5 dark blotches that are distinct from each other; lateral line passes

through these blotches. Dark stripe on side of head extending from posterior rim of orbit to upper part of operculum.

**Commercial importance in the United States:** Rarely listed on aquarist-oriented websites. Unavailable in live-food fish markets.

**Commercial importance in native range:** No specific information, but probably available in live-food fish markets in the Congo basin.

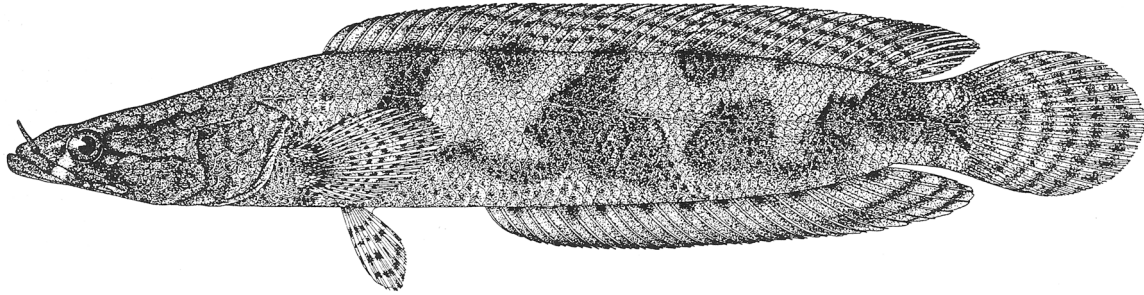
**Environmental concerns:** Likely a thrust predator showing a preference for fishes. If introduced, it could probably survive only in tropical/subtropical conditions.



*Parachanna insignis*

***Parachanna obscura* (Günther, 1861)**  
**African Snakehead**

**Type species of *Parachanna* Teugels and Daget, 1984**



Reprinted with permission from Guy G. Teugels from: Bonou, C.A., and G.G. Teugels. 1985. Révision systématique du genre *Parachanna* Teugels et Daget 1984 (Pisces: Channidae). Rev. Hydrobiol. Trop. 18(4):267-280.

**Original description:** *Ophiocephalus obscurus* Günther, 1861:476. Catalogue of the acanthopterygian fishes in the collection of the British Museum, 3:i-xxxv + 1-586. Type locality: West Africa. Syntypes: BMNH 1849.12.25.2-3.

**Synonyms:** *Ophiocephalus* (*Parophiocephalus*) *obscurus* Senna, 1924.

*Channa obscura* Myers and Shapovalov, 1932.

*Parophiocephalus obscurus* Berg, 1940.

**Common names:** **African snakehead**; snakehead; fakka (Arabic); ojul (Shilluk); abioth (Dinka); jul (Nuer); woroko (Zande; Bailey, 1994).

**Native range:** White Nile, specifically the Jebel and Ghazal systems of Sudan (Bailey, 1994) and Gambela region of Ethiopia (Golubtsov and others, 1995); Lake Chad basin; Zaire (Congo), Cross, Niger, and Senegal River basins (Boulenger, 1907, 1916; Irvine, 1947; Teugels and Daget, 1984; Bonou and Teugels, 1985; Skelton, 1988; Teugels and others, 1992). Boeseman (1957) recorded the species from Stanley Pool, Lualaba (Congo) River. Said to be “widely distributed” in Ghana and noted as both useful as food and aquarium species (Dankwa and others, 1999).

**Introduced range:** Not known to have been introduced.

**Size:** To 35 cm (Bailey, 1994).

**Habitat preference:** Bailey (1994) indicated a preference for marginal vegetation and floodplain habitat in the Sudan. Bonou and Teugels (1985) stated that this species occupies a wide variety of habitats including streams, rivers, lakes, lagoons and marshes. In

flowing water, the species occupies calm areas. Lowe-McConnell (1988) indicated this species as “widely distributed” in marshy habitats and also found in bank vegetation of river channels. Teugels and others (1992) listed the species as common in stagnant side channels of the Cross River, Cameroon-Nigeria, and found among waterlogged fallen trees and leaf debris.

**Temperature range:** No specific information, but the native range is in equatorial Africa indicating a strictly tropical species.

**Reproductive habits:** Bonou and Teugels (1985) stated that little was known of the reproductive behavior of *Parachanna obscura*. Gosse (1963) stated that young are guarded by a large adult. Likely a nest builder like other channids. Under monoculture conditions in southern Nigeria, reproductive activity was greatest in October and November (Victor and Akpocha, 1992). Fecundity in this monoculture pond varied, with stages III, IV, and V ovaries containing 35-4,010 oöcytes. Moreover, fecundity was found not

to be correlated to length or weight, but this could result from “poor culture conditions” (Victor and Akpocha, 1992).

**Feeding habits:** Bonou and Teugels (1985) cited the species as feeding on other fishes, noting that in Bénin it is used to control the young of tilapias in aquaculture ponds. Citing Blache and others (1964), they recorded the food of young as copepods and insect larvae. Adults appear to prey on other fishes (Copley, 1952; Poll, 1957; Gosse, 1963; Teugels and others, 1992). Adebisi (1981) noted that juveniles fed on prawns, copepods, and aquatic insect larvae whereas adults fed only on fishes in southern Nigeria.

In monoculture in a Nigerian pond, young of this species (10-16 cm standard length) fed primarily on detritus and larval insects, whereas larger individuals (16-24 cm standard length) contained “fish parts” and juveniles, with insects and fish making up the bulk of the diet (Victor and Akpocha, 1992).

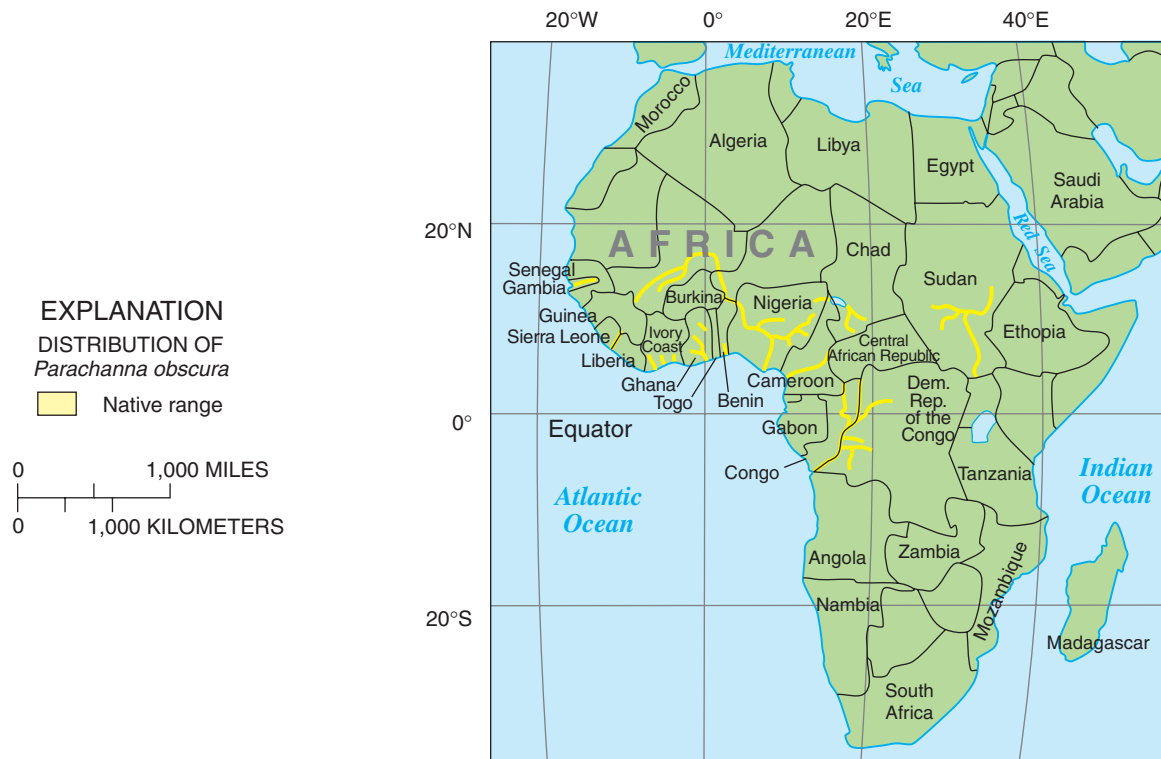
**Characters:** Patch of scales present in the gular region. No canine teeth on prevomer or palatines. Transverse scales 19-24; lateral line scales 65-78.

Dorsal fin rays 39-45; anal fin rays 26-32. Head depressed anteriorly, relatively long and covered with large scales. Lower jaw slightly longer than upper jaw, with 4-6 well-developed canines. Lateral line typically complete, rarely discontinuous. Coloration distinct among African snakeheads in having a series of dark blotches, some of which may coalesce, and no chevron-shaped bars across the middle of the back.

**Commercial importance in the United States:** Sometimes listed on aquarist-oriented websites. Not known to have been available in live-food fish markets.

**Commercial importance in native range:** Probably available in local live-food fish markets. This snakehead is being cultured in Ghana (Morrice, 1991), Nigeria (Ajana, 1983; Victor and Akpocha, 1992), and Bénin (Jackson, 1988), and was recommended for culture in the Central African Republic (Micha, 1974). All these localities are within the native range of this species.

**Environmental concerns:** Known to be a predator, particularly of other fishes (Copley, 1952; Poll, 1957; Gosse, 1963; Teugels and others, 1992).



*Parachanna obscura*